

# FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S,  
MARITZBURG,

BY

THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

---

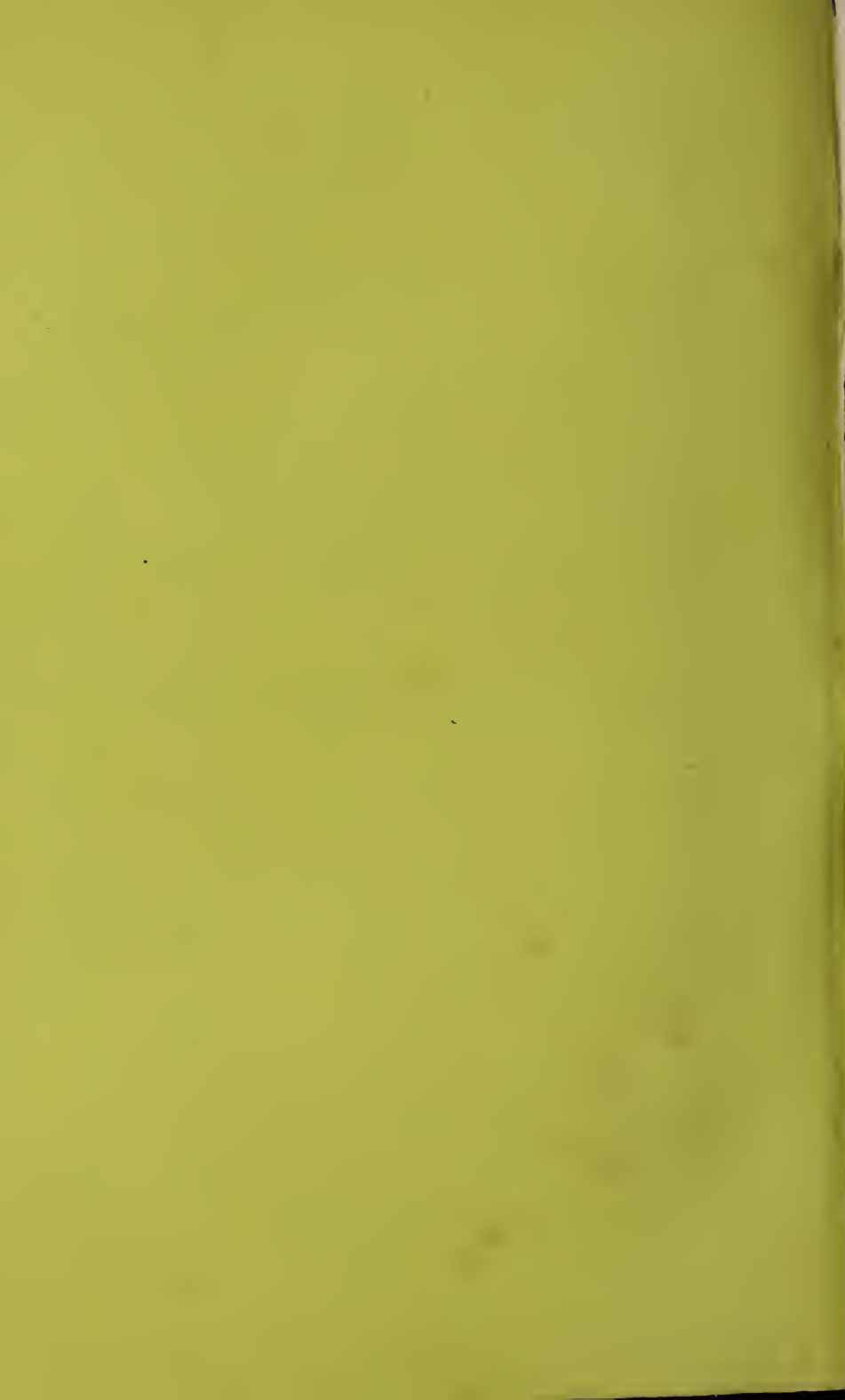
THIRD SERIES: N<sup>OS.</sup> 12 TO 15.

---

PRICE ONE SHILLING AND SIXPENCE.

---

1867.



## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Evening, July 8, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

---

PHIL.i.21.—*For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.*

WE were enquiring last Sunday what there was in the character and circumstances of St. Paul, that might attach to these words a peculiar meaning for him, which they would not have for every one. And we are now ready to consider them, as they may be applied more directly to ourselves.

### I. "To me to live is Christ."

Probably, by this expression St. Paul meant to say that he was always *one in spirit* with Christ, communing through the Spirit with his unseen Lord, present to his mind's eye, though absent to his bodily senses; for he says "I desire to depart, and be with Christ,"—as he had written elsewhere—

"Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord."

Or else he may have meant to say that his *work in life* was Christ,—to labour for him, to serve him, to advance his cause in the world,—to prepare men's hearts for his coming, which at one time certainly he deemed to be near at hand, even in the lifetime of persons then living. Whichever view we take, it amounts to the same,—that St. Paul's daily life was a life spent in the spirit of Christ, a constant drinking into that spirit, while busied in his service on earth.

And so must we daily drink into that spirit, if we would be true Christians, and followers of him whose name we bear. And what will that imply? What are the characteristic features of the spirit of Christ, which will exhibit them-

selves in the lives of all true Christians in this and every age, of all those of whom it may be said in the words of the text, "For them to live is Christ."

(i) It will imply, in the first place, a constant recognition of the Divine Presence, of the Presence of the Living God, as Christ realised it in his daily life, throughout the whole course of his ministry on earth as the Son of Man. It is to "sanctify the Lord God in our hearts," as the end and object of all our doings,—to "set God always before us,"—to realise that "in Him we live and move and have our being," that "for His pleasure we are, and were created."

To our weak minds, indeed, the sight of this wondrous frame of earth and sky, governed by unfailing laws, is too apt to obscure the vision of the Lawgiver, the perfect Wisdom, the Supreme Reason, whose laws are never recalled or changed, because no conjuncture can possibly arise unforeseen or unprovided for by Him. Yet in the secrets of our own hearts, in that mysterious world within each one of us, surely the Living God is speaking, and no mere mechanical, unalterable, necessity. If all things in heaven and earth would serve us, and bring to pass our grandest earthly imaginations, would that suffice us? Should we be satisfied? Will not the heart be still crying out for the Living God? Should we not still feel compelled by an inward irrepressible desire to say,—

"Teach me to do Thy Will, for Thou art my God!

Let Thy loving Spirit lead me into the land of uprightness!"?

Yes! for this we are created, and nothing else will satisfy us. The empire over nature, which the old magicians and astrologers pretended, or perhaps even fancied, they possessed, left them still poor and needy and wretched, and would have done so, even had their dream been true. Thou art not, O man, the centre of the Universe. An unceasing attraction towards thy true centre besets and will distort and tear thee to pieces, unless thou art placed where thou canst revolve obediently around Him and bask in His Smile.

(ii) To live, then, in the spirit of Christ is thus to realise in all our thoughts and words and works the Presence of the Living God,—and to recognise it also, secondly, as the presence of a Gracious Father, in whose image we are made, whom therefore we are to strive to resemble, as St. Paul teaches us to do when he says, "Be ye followers of God, as dear children," or Christ himself, when he enjoins us, "Be

ye therefore perfect, even as your Father in Heaven is perfect." We have light, we know, given us, by which to see our Father's Will,—the light of our minds within,—the light of the Church without, that is, the lives of all good men and true, reflecting the Divine Light, which shines upon each,—the light of the Written Word, written not only in the Bible, but in the records of faithful hearts in all ages, by which our own souls are cheered and quickened in the battle of life. And as we have light, bestowed upon us freely by the Grace of our Heavenly Father, so, too, we have life,—by the power of His Indwelling Spirit, working in us continually "both to will and to do of His good pleasure,"—stirring us with holy thoughts and hopes, desires and fears, that we may not fail of our glorious destiny, that we may walk in the light, as children of light, and, casting off the works of darkness, become more truly like unto the Father who loves us, and realise more fully our blessed hope, as "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty."

This was St. Paul's life. In Christ he beheld the revelation of the Father's Love to us. In every word of grace that fell from the lips of Jesus he recognised a message from God. In every act of sympathy with human sorrow, of pity for the sinner, joined with hatred for the sin, he saw the manifestation of the Spirit that was "given to him without measure," of the Spirit of the Father who "dwelt in him." "All things," he said, "are yours, and ye are Christ's, and Christ is God's." He beheld all humanity, as it were, gathered up in one Family, with Christ as the Head,—children of God, "heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ." What a Divine Idea was this! what an inspiration from above! Could human science, climbing upwards by slow imperceptible degrees, have ever reached this serene height? Yet what has Science, or all the subtlest speculations of the human intellect, to say against it?

(iii) But, as St. John says,—

"No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and His Love is perfected in us."

We see the Father not immediately, but as manifested in Christ, and in the sons of God, the faithful and true-hearted, of every age,—nay, more or less, in every member of the great human Family, in whose life there shines any reflection of that Light, which "is the Life of men," and which "lighteneth every man that cometh into the world." And

to live in the spirit of Christ is to recognise them all, as brethren of Christ, as children of God. As the Father dwelt in him, and he manifested forth the Father's Love, so our love to one another is the sign that "God dwelleth in us;" and we, too, by the very fact that we love our brother, bear witness that God loves him. Is there any poor prodigal outcast, that has not some human heart, in which this spirit, the spirit of Christ, is dwelling, to hang over him in tender pity, testifying thus to the tender compassions, the Infinite Patience and Fatherly Love, of God? Nay, in the secrets of many a closet, there are desires poured forth by loving hearts, filled full with the spirit of Christ; there are prayers going up continually to the Father of Mercies, groanings, wherewith His own Gracious Spirit makes intercession within them, on behalf of all mankind, on behalf of the ignorant and wretched and sin-oppressed among their brethren, as well as the good and true. There is a deep meaning in that solemn act at Rome, when year by year at the Easter Festival, the Bishop of that once Imperial City stretcheth forth his arms, and in the Name of God, on the strength of God's Promises declared by Christ, pronounces a blessing on the City and on the World. But each individual Christian is a Priest of God, as able to pronounce that blessing as he, as able to show forth the Love of God to all mankind, by exhibiting in his own heart and life that spirit of love to all, which was exhibited in Christ, which cometh from God, and is alone the sure sign, we are told, in the case of any man, that "he dwelleth in God and God in him."

Yes! in the virtuous deeds of all human beings, recorded for us in books, or living and glowing around us, we behold only rays reflected from the Great Source of Light; even as we cannot gaze upon the King of Day in his noontide splendour, but see the earth and the blue vault blessed and basking in its beams. And, as we cannot contemplate the Divine attributes otherwise than by this light reflected from human acts, so neither can we bring our homage and our service directly to the Majesty Divine. We cannot see God: but we see our Father, and serve Him, in our brethren. The "mind that was in Christ," if we are possessed with it, will compel us to lay ourselves out in labours for them, to count it our joy and privilege to spend and be spent in serving our fellowmen: whatever we may receive from them



in return, it is enough that we please their Father and ours. In many ways we can serve them,—not in mere outward matters of food and drink, of shelter and of clothing, though there is abundance here to occupy the mind of the philanthropist and to call for the money of the millionaire. But on every side delusions, old delusions and worn-out superstitions, are creeping up again, to rob the simple man of his faith in God,—to interpose the vague phantom of Church mediation between him and his Heavenly Father,—to tell him that, if men of Science are right in their grand conclusions, there is no God, no Father of our Lord Jesus, no comfort or hope for time or for Eternity,—for that all these depend upon the story of the Exodus being matter of fact, and Moses himself being the author of the Pentateuch!

We, who “have not so learned Christ,” are bound to do our best to save our weaker brethren from the snares of the sacerdotalist on the one hand and of the atheist on the other. Whether they thank us for it or not, let us speak for God and the Truth where we can; let us speak the word which God has put into our mouth. He hears us, and He knows whether our words are prompted by a sincere desire that His Name may be known, His true Character revered, by our brethren,—His Name, which is the refuge of souls, the salvation of men,—or whether it is our own name that we wish to blazon.

(iv) And therefore once more I say, the “spirit of Christ” will require that we speak the truth, at all cost,—that we buy the truth at any sacrifice of what this world holds dear; as those who know that every ray of truth is precious, and comes to us from the Father of Lights,—that, the more truly we know God, the more shall we be able to serve Him and glorify Him. Jesus himself says,—

“For this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.”

No interest of this world or the next ought to weigh with us in respect of “bearing witness to the truth,” and, in order to this, ascertaining it as far as we can. If, however, we are not convinced, in God’s Name let us not affect to be so, to obtain the credit of being orthodox, or to flatter our own slothfulness, and offer Him “the maimed and blind,” our minds merely weary of enquiring and thinking, and stupefied into acquiescence.

St. Paul, having once had the Will of God revealed to him concerning himself, and his work set before him, gave up

everything to follow that Divine call. And, though he had already given up much for Christ, though he was prepared to live a single solitary life, and to spend his days—often his nights—in ceaseless, unwearied toil for the sake of others, he had still something more to sacrifice. He had first to surrender his high place and name amongst the Scribes and Pharisees, the orthodox of those days. And who can tell, till they have tried it, what it costs to have one's name cast out as evil, by those whom in early life we have been accustomed to venerate? But, besides this, he had to sacrifice his newly-acquired reputation in the Christian community itself, where he was received at first with enthusiasm, but soon found himself at issue with the recognised leaders even there,—to whom, he says,—

“we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour, that the truth of the Gospel might continue with you,”—

the “truth of the Gospel,” as he saw it, not as any human authority had delivered it to him. He repudiates the idea of having received it from any man. And yet there were living around him the immediate disciples of Jesus, the eye-witnesses of his life and death! This is indeed a singular feature in the character of this great teacher. How would such independence of mind and thought be regarded in these days, when a laborious, almost lifelong, search is necessary, through mountains of folios and deserts of ecclesiastical antiquities, for those who would sit in the place of the teacher, and who would venture to speak with rightful authority on one article of the Christian Faith, as laid down in the Creeds!

St. Paul's doctrine is very simple, though his phraseology is often very much the reverse. By faith in Christ alone, in God's Mercies declared in Christ, he conceived that the soul became united to God, pardoned, justified, sanctified, glorified. We hear nothing from him about baptism, sacramental grace, the mediation of the priest between the soul and God. He says—

“Who shall separate us, from the Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord?”

This is the sum and substance of St. Paul's religion. He protested against the Jews and the Judaizers in the Church, who maintained the necessity of ritual observances, those ancient and venerated forms, which every Jew had been taught to regard as the very ground of his hope, the charter of his national existence. And just so are we called in these



days to protest against the Romanists and the Romanizers of our time, who would "seek to bring us back into subjection,"—to bereave us of "our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus," the "liberty wherewith Christ has made us free," the liberty to which he called his disciples, when he bade them call no man master or father upon earth, in such a sense as would deprive them of their right, as adult Christians, to "try the spirits" of their teachers, "whether they are of God," to "prove all things, and hold fast that which is good."

Some, indeed, there are who laugh to scorn the idea that each man should judge, must judge, for himself in spiritual things: and others may inveigh against it as presumptuous and profane. But ridicule or invective is a poor test of truth. If exactness in dogma indeed were essential to our present happiness and future safety, it would be reasonable to expect that a good and gracious God would have appointed some infallible guide for His creatures, though it is difficult to conceive how this could have been. But we see plainly that there is none such. And therefore we are bound to believe that to the pure in heart and life, and earnest in thought, truth sufficient will be revealed for all their needs; while we know that the possession of the most complete and accurate creed appears often unaccompanied by those Divine "fruits of the Spirit," which are the only true tokens of the children of God.

To live, then, in the spirit of Christ, is to realise devoutly the constant presence of the Living God,—to recognise habitually, in the daily practice of life, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man,—and to witness at all cost for the Truth. One who lives in this spirit knows something of that feeling which swelled the apostle's heart when he wrote, "For me to live is Christ."

## II. "And to die is gain."

St. Paul's earthly career, we know, was one of much trial and suffering. Indeed he says himself in one place,—

"If in this life only we had hope in Christ, we should be of all men the most miserable."

He had given up, as we have seen, everything in domestic life, which is dear and pleasant to all men. He had no family, no home, no country even. And yet his heart was peculiarly warm and open to every generous human feeling.

But he had also given up what some have felt to be a compensation for the absence of these ties, his reputation, his good name, amongst his fellow-religionists, both Jews and even Christians. He had been made, as he says, "the filth of the world, and the offscouring of all things." He had been "buffeted," "reviled," "persecuted," "defamed"; he was "troubled," "perplexed," "cast down, but not destroyed,"—

"always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in his mortal flock."

He had not said to his Lord, as those others, "What shall I have therefore?" But the instinct of his generous soul was content to leave his recompense in the hand of Him who judgeth righteously, and he was sure that there it was safe. To him it would be "gain" to be relieved from this earthly "tabernacle," in which he "groaned, being burdened." He said—

"I have fought the good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me in that day."

Sometimes he spoke in rapturous terms of something—

"which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, neither had it entered into the heart of man to conceive, but which God had prepared for them that love Him."

But he gives us no details of the other unseen world. He refers but vaguely to his visions, and the "unspeakable words" which he had heard; he does not indulge any one's vain curiosity on this subject. He tells us nothing of the secrets of the world beyond the grave but this, that we "shall be for ever with the Lord."

Surely, it becomes us to be at least as reticent on this mysterious subject as this great apostle. We know, indeed, that at one time he expected, with the whole Church of those days, the immediate visible return of Christ to judgment,—an expectation which was probably considerably modified, even before his own death, in the Christian Church. But he expected blessedness in some form, and the blessedness which was the natural fruit of his selfdenying labours here. And what he expected for himself, he expected for others also: for all, for whom "to live" was "Christ," "to die" would be "gain." Though his own earthly lot was peculiarly bare of earthly good, peculiarly beset with griefs and pains, such as did not fall to the lot of ordinary Christians, yet he would not have hoped for himself an exclusive reward, a blessedness, which could not be shared with others. He

would have said that for every one who lived for Christ,—that is, for that humankind, for whom Christ lived and died, for whom Christ stands as the head and representative,—for every such fellow-worker, whatever his station, whatever his calling, whatever his age or nation, whatever his colour or creed,—there was a glorious inheritance, to be entered upon after the death of this mortal body. The true blessedness of man is not something which can be diminished by partition, like the goods of this life. And the very idea of being freed from this mortal body and its requirements suggests also the removal of many of those things, which make our happiness here in some measure selfish; since here we all need for our wellbeing what we cannot share with others, without actually suffering ourselves, it may be, from the want of it.

But there are other things to try us here besides the limitations of the body. *Then*, we are told, “we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” :—

“Beloved, now are we the children of God, and it is not yet manifested what we shall be; but we know that, when it shall be manifested, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.”

To see Him that IS—

“the King, Eternal, Immortal, Invisible, whom no mortal man hath seen or can see,”—

to see the Living God, as He is, and to be like Him, by beholding that glorious vision,—these are wondrous words, which surpass all our powers of thought or imagination. This world, indeed, is full of glorious beauty, and the light of each returning day displays to us afresh on every side innumerable signs of the wondrous Majesty, and Wisdom, and Goodness of our God. Yet the daylight hides from us the grandeur of the night; and the sight of that starry host, spread out before our eyes, suggests to us realms of glory unimagined, to which those distant spheres belong, but of which at present we have not the very faintest conception. If our little globe is so stupendous in its revelations of our Creator's Greatness, what must each separate star disclose to us, if we could only read its mysteries, and what the countless Suns and Systems, that make up the Mighty Universe which night unfolds to us, and that but a part—perhaps but a particle—of the awful whole!

“Lo, these are parts of His ways; but how little a portion is heard of them! but the thunder of His power who can understand?”

But, in those most expressive words, which I have formerly quoted at greater length—

If *Light* can thus deceive, wherefore not *Life*?

“We know not what we shall be.” But we may be sure of this, that if, after doing life’s duties faithfully here,—faithfully according to the measure of the gifts of light and life which we have enjoyed,—faithfully according to the merciful judgment of Him, who—

“knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust,”—

if, I say, at the close of such a life in this world, God calls us to pass into another, “to die” will be “gain” for us, though we cannot say how, a progress into a higher state of being, with nobler powers, and more expanded faculties, with capabilities of using those which we possess indeed here, but which have been here undeveloped, or, perhaps, through our own self-sacrificing constancy, in the discharge of our appointed duties, have been here unexercised and unenjoyed.

We cannot tell, nor could St. Paul have told us, what the full glory of that better state will be. But this we may say,—though we say it reverently, for God may order otherwise,—

(i) It will be “gain” to be freed from the *uncertainty*,—the puzzles and perplexities, which trouble us here,—not merely those questions of science and criticism, which vex so many in the present day,—but those *moral* difficulties, which have harassed at times the minds of most thoughtful men, when considering the history of our race, and of God’s dealings with them. Why have multitudes, whole races, been left for ages in a state of such mental and moral degradation? Why are such vast tracts of humanity still black with the darkness of besotted heathenism? Why have such desolating wars, and cruel oppressions, been suffered to ravage the fairest regions of the earth, and to cover so many battle-fields with goodly forms of men struck down in their prime? Why have the Divine Truths of Christianity, which were meant to be the bond of union and love for all mankind, been suffered to be so distorted and debased with human corruptions, that men habitually revile, calumniate, hate, and have often killed, one another, in the name of Christ, in the name of him who lived and died for all? Why do animals suffer at the hand of man? Why does sin exist in the world at all? How calming to the troubled mind, vexed with questions such as these concerning God and His



Government, vexed by the dark clouds which cross at times our field of vision, however confident we feel in His Goodness and Wisdom, who can scatter them all when He sees fit,—how desirable, I say, is the prospect of that time, which is coming, when “we shall know even as we are known”! How sweet is the thought that in another life we may come nearer to our God, whom we have served here, often perhaps in darkness and with tear-dimmed eyes, and see the glory and the beauty, the perfect righteousness and love, which shines in *all* the doings of our Father,—as we are sure it does from those strong instincts of our own hearts, which demand such love and righteousness in Him, whose children we are, after whose image we are made, though here through mortal weakness we have often failed to see Him.

(ii) It will be “gain” also, as we trust, not only to know God, but to know each other, better,—to judge and to be judged more truly and fairly,—as our own poet speaks of the dead, who watch—

With larger, other, eyes than ours,  
To make allowance for us all.

A great part, indeed, of the trials of God’s servants in this world arises from the narrowness and bitterness of their fellow-Christians. Many, who as men would be unwilling to judge harshly of their fellowmen, would be ashamed to deal unfairly or ungenerously with them, yet, if they chanced to differ with them on some subject within the domain of theology,—more especially, if they seem in their minds to be open to the charge of *heresy*,—lay aside at once the amenities of life, become bitter, unjust, personal, abusive, capable of insinuating base motives, evil intentions, in their adversaries, and utterly incapable of looking at things calmly and reasonably, from *their* point of view as well as their own. In the next world, we trust, there will be no atmosphere to support these foul vapours. The prophet of old looked forward to a time, when—

“they should teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, “Know the Lord,” for they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord.”

In such a blessed time, there would be no room for theological controversy. And, whether the Prophet’s hopes be fulfilled in this world or in the next, these fierce disputes will end, we may believe, at last, not from deadness and indifference to these high subjects, but because clear light



from our Father's throne will shine upon our eyes, and on the path our feet shall tread.

But have we used so faithfully the light here granted us, that we may reckon humbly on an increase of that light? Has our life been, in any real sense, a life in the spirit of Christ, a life of communion with God, as ever present with us, as the Great Being whose we are and for whom we live? Has it been in any measure our ruling desire to "do always such things, as shall please" our Father in Heaven? Have our fellow-creatures, men and women, who have come in contact with us, been the better for us, and not the worse,—had, at least, the benefit of our brotherly sympathy and our example, had what guidance and help we could give them in the narrow way of life? Freemasons, we know, recognise each other by a mysterious sign, and are bound to render mutual help and fellowship. Ought not the name of Christian to be at least as binding a tie, to express as near a relationship? Or, rather, to the true follower of Christ, to the true child of the Almighty Father, is not every living man a brother? In the next world, at least, we may expect artificial distinctions of all kinds to vanish; and what will then remain but the essential verities, the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man?

How, then, shall we feel in that world of realities, if our kindnesses to others have been only such as were barely needful to smoothen our own path through life's crowded highway,—if we have lived selfish lives, or, worse, have wasted our Heavenly Father's substance in riotous living? Why should we expect that this little individuality of ours, which has begun and ended with itself, should be prolonged and elevated and adorned with angelic perfections? We do not dream of another life for the beasts of the field, whose final cause seems to be the service of man. Why should those who have lived like beasts, look for a place of glory in the World Unseen?

O! yet the meanest, basest, human creature cannot surely be quite—be only—a beast. A cry arises from its bosom, a cry of anguish, it may be, yet the cry of a child still, for entrance to its Father's house, though it be but to fill some menial place there. And we, however unworthy we may feel of those thrones of light, which have been spoken of in the Christian Scriptures as prepared for the saints of God, have each a longing for a better life, for more light from the

Source of Light, for a nearer approach to His Presence, whose creatures we are, from whom we have our being. At least, we may cast ourselves into His Arms who is a "Faithful Creator," who will not disappoint and deceive the hopes and desires which He Himself has awakened, who cannot abandon to despair and death one soul that loves Him.

"As His Majesty is, so is His Mercy." And for those who are more dear to us than ourselves, as well as for our own souls when the time arrives to die, let us take refuge under the shadow of His Throne. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of God's Fatherly Love to Man, has indeed brought "life and immortality" into clearer light than before. For it is on our relationship to the Eternal, as children, on His Love and Care for us, of which our Lord so emphatically speaks, that our hopes beyond the grave must rest. "Precious," said the old Hebrew Psalmist, "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His Saints." But the "Saints" were in his mind only the chosen nation, or, perhaps, even only the choicest part of that. The Gospel bids us see in every child of man an heir of glory, though it may be severe discipline will be needed, in this world or in the next, to train him up for this.

If, however, the next world, in all its details, blissful or awe-inspiring, could be made plain before us, probably it would paralyze our powers of action in this. *Now* we are to live, *now* to praise God, supplied, as we are, with choice gifts of His Love, and blessed with unnumbered mercies. Is the thankless heart, which repines at its present lot, likely without some sharp discipline, to be fitted to appreciate something *higher*! A *higher* calling may be *harder*. But, in truth, life with all its blessings, privileges, duties, labours,—ay, and even with its griefs and trials,—is very sweet for most—for all—of us.

Whatever crazy sorrow saith,  
No life, that breathes with human breath,  
Has ever truly longed for death.

'Tis life, wherewith our nerves are scant;  
Oh, life, not death, for which we pant;  
More life, and fuller, that we want.

Let us use this precious gift of mortal life diligently and devoutly while we have it, yet be ready, if He will, to resign it, assured that all is well, which He decrees, for all is in His hands who cannot err, and who tenderly loves and pities His children.

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, July 15, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

---

\* JOHN iii.5.—*Jesus answered, Verily, Verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.*

IT is obvious that more must have passed between our Lord and Nicodemus, on the occasion of this conversation, than is recorded in this chapter. Nicodemus, it would seem, came to Jesus, not only at night, but alone, in order to escape more effectually the observation of men. And the narrative seems to imply that he found our Lord alone, and conversed with him privately, without the presence of any of his disciples. In that case, the writer of this Gospel, whether St. John himself, or, as seems almost certain, a far later writer living about the middle of the Second Century, could not have heard what really passed at the time between the Great Teacher and his timid enquirer. At the most, he could only have received some account of the interview from Nicodemus or possibly from Christ himself, but still more probably from a reminiscence of the report of the former, handed down by tradition in the Church.

From what source, then, the writer of this Gospel derived the narrative before us, we cannot tell. But certain it is, that he has recorded it throughout in *his own style*,—in that which distinguishes the fourth Gospel and the epistles ascribed to St. John, and very different from that which marks the character of our Lord's discourses, as given in the other three Gospels. It is impossible, in fact, to say how far he has imported into his account of this conversation—not only

the language, but—the modes of thought also, the ideas and doctrines, of a later age.

After this explanation, however, we cannot be surprised at the *abruptness* which appears in different parts of our Lord's address, as here recorded, — at the want of any apparent close connexion between successive verses. When, therefore, Nicodemus begins by saying,—“ Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no one can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him,”—we may suppose that something more was said by him than this,—that some question was put, some enquiry made, which drew forth the answer,—

‘ Verily, Verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.’

We may suppose that Nicodemus had asked about this “ kingdom,” of which he had already heard so much in the preaching of John the Baptist, of our Lord himself, and his disciples. For some time past, the cry of the forerunner had been heard, ‘ Repent ye! Repent ye! for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!’ And what would this kingdom be? How or when should it be set up on earth? Nicodemus, no doubt, like any other pious Jew of those days, shared fully in the fond hope of his people, that their great Messiah, the conquering King, to whom so many prophecies were pointing, would shortly be revealed, would triumph over all his foes, and make them partakers of his Glory and Greatness. Even the disciples, long after they had followed the steps of Jesus, were still looking for this. Simon Peter could ask, ‘ We, who have left all and followed thee, what shall we have therefore?’ They could all dispute together by the way as to who ‘should be the greatest’; and the brothers, John and James, could come with the request that one should sit on the right, and the other on the left, of their Lord, when he should appear in his kingdom. We may well believe that Nicodemus in the text had the same low and carnal view of Christ's kingdom,—that he came with the full persuasion that as an Israelite, a child of Abraham, more especially as a dutiful, devout, obedient Israelite, he at all events was sure of entering that kingdom, whenever and however it should come. He wished to know all about it, when it would begin, what would be its privileges, how he himself, perhaps, might have a high place in it. But he had no doubt whatever as to his right and title to *have a share*



in that kingdom, to *see* it, to *enter* into it. He was a true-born Israelite; he had Abraham to his father; and he had not lived otherwise than as became a son of Abraham. That was enough to make good his claim to this.

We see more clearly now the force and inner meaning of our Lord's reply, as recorded in the text. Thou wishest to know about the kingdom of God,—to know who shall have the honours and the dignities there, to know what portion of them, perhaps, shall fall to thy lot; for thou art born a Jew, a child of Abraham, and hast no doubt, therefore, of thy portion being sure in that kingdom. But know thou this that, except thou hast another birth than that from Abraham, thine earthly sire, thou shalt not even 'see the kingdom of God.'

"That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit."

"Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

It is not, then, to some change that must *hereafter* pass upon Nicodemus, whether by the outward act of Baptism, or the inward operation of the Spirit, that the words of Jesus are primarily meant to refer,—but to the *fact* itself, that a spiritual birth is needed for every man, whether Jew or Gentile, who would enter the kingdom of heaven. In point of fact, Nicodemus had already, we may be sure, been 'born again' for the kingdom of God. The life of God was already within him. The Spirit of God, breathing on his spirit, had kindled a desire to know the truth, had brought him, a lowly listener, to sit at the feet of Jesus. But as yet he knew it not. He knew not whence had come those thoughts and questionings within him, that movement of his inner being, by which from time to time he had felt his spirit stirred, by which he had had communings with God, or pitied and served and loved his fellowman. Yes! God had been with him all along, as He is with each one of us, and His still small voice had been speaking in his heart, as it speaks day by day in ours. But he knew it not, knew not whence came those wonderful signs of spiritual life, of a life which reaches beyond this lower world, and of what an august parentage they testified. He was thinking only of his poor miserable claims, as a true-born Jew, as a child of Abraham; when the work of God's Spirit, which was going on within him, was bearing witness with his spirit all the while that he was "born of God."



The Jewish notion, then, concerning God's Kingdom was, that it was a visible external kingdom, in which Jehovah should reign *instead of Caesar*, and His chosen people fill all subordinate offices. And this, as we have seen, possessed at first the minds even of the disciples of Christ; this made them stumble continually at the teaching of their Master who said, "The Kingdom of God is within you." It was long ere they awoke from their dream of Israel's ascendancy amongst the nations. Perhaps it was only effectually dissipated, for many of the early Jewish Christians, when their city was destroyed by Titus, and their natural existence came to an end.

But, at the time when these words of the text were written, the author of this Gospel, whoever he may have been, seems to have come to the clear understanding of the words of his Master, reported by one and another of those who heard him, and to have grasped the idea, which runs, like the main thread, through all his recorded teachings, that the kingdom of God is in the hearts, and over the wills, of men, that it despises mere outward homage, and disdains compulsion, that slavery is alien to its very nature, that a free and willing service is the only one the Heavenly King will accept, that the pomp and splendour of this world are too vulgar and trivial to be used in His worship, who clothes the grass and flowers of the field in beauty, beyond the Court of an Eastern Monarch. Those who, in the language of this Gospel, recognised the Living Word of God, the Light which is "the Life of men," which "lighteneth every man that cometh into the world," as the King of men, the Lord of men's hearts, must have been thereby emancipated from narrow Jewish views. They must have thought, as we must do, that the title even of "Prince of the Kings of the Earth" is too low for the Creator of all worlds, as it implies that His Power and Authority is the same in kind as theirs, and only greater in degree,—that it is an external oppressive Power, a Power to be submitted to because we *must*, the rule of the stronger. The same Being, indeed, who rules in the Kingdom of Heaven, is the Author and Enforcer of the irresistible Laws of Nature, which our Saviour teaches us to reverence and submit to, when he says—

"Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature!"

But the "Kingdom of Heaven," of which he continually spoke, was something other, something greater, something quite

apart and different from this. Besides all merely natural powers and forces, above them, beyond them, there is the will of man,—rather, the wills of all spiritual beings, whatever others there may be besides man. Here the same powers, which are omnipotent in nature, are powerless,—as the fire, which melts the metal, only hardens the clay. Here compulsion only serves to give energy to rebellion, to resistance, till the very being is destroyed, in whom the rebellious will exists. Yet here, even here, shall Our Father reign, and “God shall be all in all.” For there is a Power of which Nature knows nothing, and which only acts on its own kindred beings,—that mighty Power, of which the old Hebrew Poet says,—

“Many waters cannot quench it, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for it, it would utterly be contemned.”

It is ‘strong as death’: it is the Power of Love.

This is, in fact, as we know, the very Name of God in the New Dispensation. God is Light; that Name expresses one view of His Perfections, and teaches us that we must not shun the light, we must not shrink from it, we must heartily welcome it, from whatever quarter it may reach us,—we must come to it, and bring our deeds to it continually, that we may see that they are wrought in God,—we must walk in the light as children of the light, as God our Father is Light, and in Him is no darkness at all. But also “God is Love,” says the apostle, “and he, that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.” The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news concerning the Father, is the very proclamation of this kingdom of Light and Love. It is not the proclamation of liberty to sin, to follow our own carnal desires, to live at ease in this world, and fear nothing for the future, as some still affirm of our teaching, just as St. Paul says they did of his—

“As we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say, Let us do evil that good may come, whose damnation is just.”

But the good news, that we have a Father, brings with it, as a correlative truth, the fact that we are children,—children of God,—not each to follow his own will and his own way, but to listen to our Father’s voice and to obey it. He speaks to us by our own consciences, enlightened and informed by every outward aid, by all the human teachers His Providence has vouchsafed and ordained for us. Nor will He chide us for any lack of wisdom, which we have had no means of acquiring, or drive us from His Presence, here or hereafter,

for thinking differently on any point from that which is the very truth, the reflection in a created mind of real substantial being,—if we have not had means or power to arrive at a clear and right conviction. As men, as spiritual creatures, with reason and conscience and immortal yearnings, we were born subjects of that Heavenly King, whose “Law is perfect converting the soul, whose Testimonies are sure, making wise the simple.” If it were not so, indeed, another birth would make us other creatures, not the same creatures redeemed. But now, obedience to our King and Father, obedience to One adored, both out of gratitude for unnumbered blessings of life, and for His own ineffable perfections, is the very essence of religion, the root and stem of morality. ‘Depart from me!’ is the most dreadful threat to transgressors in the heavenly kingdom, and ‘Hide not thy Face from us!’ the deepest desire, the most passionate cry, of the renewed heart.

But how shall we enter into this kingdom, where Love reigns,—Love, not weak indulgence of evil, but Love that will not spare the needful chastisement, that ‘will by no means clear the guilty,’ by any false imputation of righteousness,—a kingdom in which to take up the cross, and follow Him who bore it, in meek submission to God’s Will, is the true, the only, way to peace, to joy, to a sure life beyond the grave? How shall we *enter* it? We *have* entered it; it is our birthright; we are all heirs of that kingdom, and more or less we have been sharing in its blessings ever since we were born, though too often have we been willing to barter away our choicest privileges, the joy and peace of God’s children, for some miserable mess of pottage. Yes! the perverseness—but not only so, the inborn strength and vigour also—of the human will makes its subjection and conformity to the Divine Will, in which its perfection consists, a work of constant *renewal, redemption, regeneration*. ‘O Israel! thou hast destroyed thyself: but in Me is thy help found.’ Man is ever destroying, losing, casting away himself, selling himself into slavery,—slavery that would be the most dire and hopeless, but for God, the King, the Saviour, the Redeemer, who by His laws in nature chastens the transgressor, but by His Fatherly pardoning Spirit in the Gospel calls him back to Himself while He chastens, calls him back to hope, to life, to divine love and penitent gratitude.

Thus, although a 'birth from above' as much belongs to every human creature as his descent from his earthly parents by natural generation, it is not so well described as an event once happening, once and for ever, like the natural birth, but rather as a *constant returning* to the Source of Life, a *daily birth* like that of the morning from the night, a frequent recourse of creatures, ever fainting or incurring fresh pollution, to the refreshing, purifying, lifegiving spring. We cannot keep the light within our eyes, nor yet the life within our hearts, when we depart and wander into the cold shades of night, into the blackness of the valley of the shadow of death, into the dismal haunts of sin. We cannot take with us the beams of the Central Sun. We can but return, and be born once more,—yea, be born, if need be, again and again,—into the sphere of his radiance.

The words of Our Lord in the text describe our spiritual life in its beginnings as a birth of water and the spirit,—that is, according to the genius of the Hebrew Language, of the Spirit metaphorically described as water, the well-known properties of water being brought to explain the operations (hidden and mystical to sense) of the Divine Spirit. But this is only a figure, like the fire or the oil or the wind, which are also used to illustrate the work of the Spirit of God. Still, whatever symbol be used, the work of Grace must be repeated again and again. "All things are of God." He, who is our Creator, is also our Redeemer and Sanctifier; that is, as He has endowed us at our birth with a will, with which to choose between the good and the evil, and as this will of ours is but, at the best, according to our nature, weak, liable to error, open to temptation, God interposes as our Redeemer again and again, rescues us out of our misery, fetches us back from our wanderings, corrects our faults, often with sharp discipline, but not more sharp than needful, abides with us finally through all life's struggles, and fits us at last for admission to His nearer Presence.

Hence it is that our birthright, as spiritual beings, as children of God, is spoken of continually as something recovered, renewed,—as *regeneration*, although entered upon in fact at the same time with our first, our natural, birth. In all life there is a power of rejecting alien, and therefore defiling and destroying, elements. The Divine Life in the soul, its life of love to God and man, grows up and is nourished there in the midst of many things, which yet



contain within them the material of corruption,—and even by means of them. Our natural affections, though divine appointments, and images, yes, incarnations, of things heavenly, have blended with them much that fosters the mere animal, the selfish nature. And thus our Lord found it needful to utter those seemingly harsh words,—

“Whoso loveth father or mother, son or daughter, more than me,—more than the life of duty to which I call him,—is not worthy of me.”

In other words, he tells us, the most sacred ties must yet be subordinate to one more sacred than all. At the will of God, in obedience to the truth, at the call of duty, we must even part, if necessary, from those most dear, for whom to lay down life itself would be a small and little-considered sacrifice.

The Divine Life, then, is described in the text as a birth of ‘water and the Spirit,’ that is, a birth of the Spirit as a Purifier. The Love of God, allegiance to Duty, to the Right and the True, is the only Power which can really *purify* the soul. Future interests may be balanced against present interests and inclinations, and vices of conduct may thus be corrected. But this does not touch the springs of action,—does not purify the heart. The wish to do ill, the love of sin, is as defiling in the eyes of the Searcher of hearts, as the evil done, the sin committed. How shall we learn to see things as God sees them, to hate sin for its own exceeding sinfulness, not merely for its bitter consequences, here or hereafter, to love God for His own glorious perfections, not merely on account of what He may give or withhold from ourselves?

Yet, as born subjects of His Kingdom, still more as members of His Church, called out to know Him more than others, privileged to approach Him nearer than others, professed worshippers of the Living God, yet taught by Himself to name His Name, not merely as servants, but as children, we have the promise of that free, that princely, spirit, which shall purify us from our many stains, and administer to us an abundant entrance into His Kingdom.

The preaching of repentance was the first announcement of the kingdom of God both by Jesus and his forerunner. And this corresponds with the teaching of this chapter concerning the new birth. The spiritual life, which is equivalent to that kingdom, is indeed, as I have said, the birthright of every human creature. If any were not thus “born from



above," if any were without the power of appreciating goodness, truth, moral beauty, spiritual excellence, of distinguishing between right and wrong without respect to consequences, the mere accidents which may attend them,—such would not be morally responsible; they would be exempt from the Law as being beneath it, even as we suppose the brutes to be. Yet which of us has not—if not utterly despised at times, and sold, his birthright—yet fallen far beneath it? Which of us by unswerving "obedience to God's Will" has won the glorious prize of perfect knowledge of that Holy Will? Who, therefore, does not need continually the "baptism of repentance for the remission of sins,"—once performed as a rite, a sign and pledge of Divine forgiveness and favour, but in its meaning to be repeated,—frequently, constantly, repeated, whenever we renew our vows at the Holy Table, whenever we are conscious of any inward falling away from a fixed purpose to serve the Lord, whenever we have been betrayed into acts inconsistent with that purpose? Do we not all need to be "transformed by the constant renewing of our mind," by being born again and again of water and of the Spirit,—

"that we may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect Will of God?"

Far from teaching, as some have imagined, the necessity of the outward rite of baptism by water, as an admission into the Church, there is scarcely more than the most indirect allusion to Baptism in this chapter, if indeed in the writer's mind there was any intention to refer to it at all. Just so in the 6th chapter of this Gospel, where Jesus speaks of the necessity of our "eating his flesh and drinking his blood," if we would have any life in us, the reference is to the necessity of feeding upon the Divine Doctrine which he taught,—of the Fatherhood of God, of the Brotherhood of Man,—and not at all to the Lord's Supper,—except indirectly, as one means of feeding on this Divine Food, while we do this "in remembrance of him." In fact, the idea in the text is to substitute the true Christian view for that erroneous notion of the external nature of the Kingdom of God, which the Jews entertained, and the privileges of which they supposed belonged to them by virtue of their natural descent from Abraham,—a notion which was of long maintained by many in the early Church, who were not of the school of St. Paul, but which had now passed away from the fancies of men, when this Gospel was written. It is to substitute the

spiritual idea of the Divine Power and Authority, — the Authority of the Truth, the Power of Love,—which reign supreme in that Kingdom, the blessings of which belong not to Jews as Jews, but to men as men, to men as God's sons, as partakers of the Divine Nature, as related by a spiritual birth, as well as natural, to the "God of the spirits of all flesh,"—

"who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God."

After reading the large and deep expressions of the Sacred Volume on this subject, how great a bathos is it, how false does it ring, to add,—“Yes, those, who are sprinkled by a priest with the appointed formula, enjoy these glorious privileges, have a right to approach the Creator of Heaven and Earth, as children coming to a Parent,—but none of the human race besides.” All others are destitute of God's Grace, of the inspirations of His Spirit, are aliens from the Family of God, are without God, without Light, without Life, without Hope in this world or in the next.

It is but the old Jewish notion, revived in another form, —the selfishness of man ever tending to contract the circle in which God's Love and Grace shall be displayed,—God's Love which is as free as the air we breathe, as the light which shines for all. The carnal heart is ever prone to seek some outward proof of its state being *safe*,—some outward sign by which it may be assured that “the Lord has spoken.” It is ever ready to substitute for the spiritual Temple of a pure and loving heart, in which God dwells continually, the material, exclusive one, in which the Presence of God may be surely found, whatever may be the case without the pale. Instead of the “perfect law of liberty,” under which all mankind are embraced as children, and may “rejoice in the hope of the glory of God,” it falls back gladly on a system of rites and ceremonies, and outward badges of profession, as the only sure signs of that Kingdom being set up on earth. Instead of the Voice of God, heard in the secrets of their hearts by all, and heard especially by all good men and true, it is ready to set up the authority of a Book, of a Priesthood, of a human infallible Head.

But “the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink,”—is not anything cognizable by the senses: it is “righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost.”

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Evening, July 15, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

---

2 THESS. ii. 12.—*That they all may be (damned) judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*

I NEED hardly say that the 'Man of Sin,' about whom so much is said in the chapter from which the text is taken, and which has been read as the Second Lesson for this Evening, has been the subject of many a discussion, and given rise to many a confident prediction, among theologians of all ages. At one time he was the Roman Emperor Nero, at another Mahomet, at another Oliver Cromwell, at another the first Napoleon; some took him to be Simon Magus, others to be Heresy personified; the Reformers regarded him as symbolising the Papacy, the Pope as prefiguring the Reformation; and these latter opinions are very probably still maintained extensively within the bounds of the Christian Church. Thus in an edition of the Greek Testament lately published by two very excellent Protestant Commentators (Webster and Wilkinson) we read as follows, II. pp. 99, 100:—

That the Papacy is here intended will appear as we proceed. . . . 'Man of sin' is explained by 'that Wicked.' He is emphatically the 'sinful man,' the human personification of sin, the visible representative on earth of that original wickedness which set itself up against God, and was first manifested in deceit and lies,—a most appropriate title for the recognised head of that system which is a development of the depravity of human nature. . . . It is not the opposition of Atheism or absolute irreligion, but a claim of undue spiritual exaltation, supremacy, and power, a misdirection of religious worship which amounts to an opposition such as is described. . . . The terms of St. Paul's prophetic description are fully satisfied by the existence of a system, the head of which, always a single person, claims, and has exercised, supreme and universal authority over the Church, represents himself as, in his presence and actions,

the personal visible manifestation of Divine power and grace, assumes the attributes and title of 'Vicar of Christ' and Vicegerent of the Son of God, and therefore exhibits himself as the perfect equivalent to the promised perpetual presence of God with His Church on earth.

On the other hand the Rhemish translation of the New Testament, used in the Roman Church, in its notes upon the passage before us, while it regards the full development of evil, the actual presence of the Man of Sin, as yet to come, has no difficulty in regarding the work of the Reformation as the 'mystery of iniquity,' which was even then working and preparing the way for the great catastrophe.

If the Adversaries had said that this revolt [or 'falling away'], which the apostle foretelleth shall come before the world's end, is meant of great numbers of Heretics and Apostates revolting from the Church, they had said truth of themselves and such others, whom St. John calleth Antichrists . . . . Which revolt having been begun and continued by Heretics of divers ages, resisting and hating the seat of Peter, because it is Christ's fort, erected against hell-gates and all Heretics, and being now wonderfully increased by those of our days, the real precursors of Antichrist, as it may seem, shall be fully achieved a little before the end of the world by Antichrist himself. . . . And by these two things you may easily perceive that the Heretics of these days do more properly and nearly prepare the way to Antichrist and to extreme desolation, than ever any before, their special heresy being against the spiritual Primacy of Popes and Bishops, and against the Sacrifice of the Altar, in which two the Sovereignty of Christ in earth consisteth.

Certainly, I cannot adopt either the Romanist or Protestant view of the matter. Still less can I sympathise with those who, from this and other passages of Scripture, combined with events which have occurred in the world's history, or which are even now transpiring in the age in which they live, are ready to construct a scheme of historical development for the future, and to gratify the curiosity of those who ask now, as they did of old,—

"Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world?"

I believe that all such enquiries are most vain and unprofitable,—that they are based upon a false view of the authority of Scripture, and a mistaken notion as to the real nature of the gift of prophecy. Doubtless, on the traditionary view, which supposes that every utterance in the prophetic and apostolical writings is infallibly true,—ignoring the fact that many prophecies of the Old Testament and expectations of the New have never been fulfilled,—as, for instance, those of the restoration of the glory of Israel, and of the immediate coming of Christ,—on this view, I say, it is natural that such solutions, as I have mentioned, should be sought for the mysterious prediction of the Man of Sin,—that opposite



explanations should be put forth by opposite parties,—that, when one conjecture is found to fail, another should be hazarded. But the very contrariety of these opinions may suggest the possibility, that there is something unsound in the process by which they are arrived at. And I think we shall see that a much more rational and intelligible account of the matter may be given, by using the light which modern enquiry has thrown upon the Scriptures.

There can be no doubt that St. Paul, when he wrote the passage before us, had his eye upon the words of the Book of Daniel,—that remarkable Book, which is rather a history of its own times in the form of a prophecy, than an actual series of predictions of the future, and which critical investigation has shown to have been written about the year 165 B.C., when the Jews were still suffering under the oppressive rule of Antiochus Epiphanes. Like the Book of Enoch, the product of a still later age, yet still composed before the birth of Christ, the language of the Book of Daniel seems to have affected very strongly the views of the early Christians; and in the Book of the Revelations we find the plainest imitations of its style. In that address recorded in the first three Gospels, wherein Jesus himself predicts to his disciples the approaching fall of Jerusalem, he refers also to the contents of this Book, and speaks of their seeing—

“the abomination of desolation, spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place.”

And, whether the words of Christ in this address were misinterpreted or misreported, or whatever else may have been the real cause of the error, certain it is, as I have had occasion before now to mention, and to show by a number of Scriptural passages, that in the infant Church, and among the apostles themselves, there prevailed for a long time the strongest expectation of the immediate personal return of the Son of Man, in the clouds of heaven, to judgment.

The earlier epistles of St. Paul are full of passages which show the existence of this feeling, and more especially the two epistles to the Thessalonians, which are the earliest of all. It is in the first of these epistles that he speaks of some being then alive who would “remain unto the coming of the Lord,” and “would not prevent”—be a step beforehand—“those who slept” in the grave, and that he says again more fully—

“The Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise



first; then *we, which are alive and remain*, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air."

In the second epistle, from which the text is taken, though he warns the Thessalonians not to be "soon shaken in mind or be troubled," as if the result of his teaching had led them to believe that "the day of Christ was at hand," that is, *very close* at hand, yet he still seems to look for it in his own lifetime upon earth. He says, for instance:—

"It is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you, and to you who are troubled *rest with us*, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ; who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints and to be admired in all them that believe in that day."

And he beseeches them "by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him." But, he says, that day will not come instantly:—

"That day shall not come except there come a falling away first, and that Man of Sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God."

Here we have evidently language directly taken from the Book of Daniel. He, that "opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or is worshipped," is evidently the same as the king in Daniel, who shall—

"exalt himself and magnify himself above every God, and shall speak marvelous things against the God of Gods, neither shall he regard the God of his fathers, nor regard any God; for he shall magnify himself above all." xi.36,37.

He that "as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God," reminds us of the 'little horn,' who should—

"wax great, even to the host of heaven, and should cast down of the host and of the stars to the ground, and stamp upon them,—should take away the daily sacrifice, and cast down the place of his sanctuary"—should set up "the abomination that maketh desolate," and "give both the sanctuary and the host to be trodden under foot."

That "Man of Sin, the son of perdition," is in Daniel the "King of fierce countenance," who shall—

"stand up in the latter time, when the transgressors are come to the full, and shall prosper and practise, and shall destroy the mighty and the holy people."

The "falling away," the apostasy, of which the apostle speaks, before "that Wicked" One shall be revealed, corresponds with the statement in Daniel, that he whose "heart

shall be against the holy covenant," who shall "have indignation against the holy covenant,"—

' shall even return, and have intelligence with them that *forsake the holy covenant*, and such as *do wickedly against the covenant* shall he corrupt by flatterers,' xi.30,32,—

shall corrupt, as the apostle here says, "with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, in them that perish." In short, it is plain that St. Paul, having perhaps had his attention fixed upon the Book of Daniel by those words of our Lord, which had come down in the traditions of the Church, though probably not yet written down in the Gospels, has largely adopted the ideas—almost at times, the very language—of that Book, and fully expected the appearance of some individual, some incarnation of all evil, who should correspond to its descriptions. Doubtless, the "little horn" of Daniel, the "king of fierce countenance," was meant to shadow forth in the eyes of men then living the tyrant Antiochus Epiphanes himself, who had horribly polluted the sacred place by setting up in the Temple once more, as in the days of old before the Captivity, idolatrous images, "the abomination of desolation." But St. Paul probably did not consider that the words of this Book had been *completely* fulfilled—if fulfilled at all—in this way. He fully expected, as we have seen, in his own day the coming of Christ, and he supposed that, before that, this "Wicked One" would be revealed, who should "stand up," as the Book of Daniel says, "against the Prince of princes," but should "be broken without hand," should "come to his end and none should help him,"—"whom," therefore, says the apostle,—

"The Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming."

Already, indeed, in the afflictions of the Church, St. Paul saw, as he thought, the "mystery of iniquity" beginning to work, and all things tending to this grand consummation. It has been suggested, indeed, and not without much show of reason, that St. Paul may here be referring to the young prince Nero, who was already designated as the successor of the aged reigning Emperor Claudius. *His* predecessor, Caligula, had actually ordered his own image to be set up in the Temple at Jerusalem and worshipped, as Antiochus Epiphanes had done before him; and had excited thereby the most violent indignation and horror among the Jewish

nation. Claudius had suppressed such practices, and was still in power, "letting" or restraining the further progress of this evil. But Nero, the future Emperor, showed every sign already of a determined intention to tread in the steps of Caligula, and go far beyond him. And in the near prospect of his reign St. Paul may have seen the full realisation of the Man of Sin.

But this explanation does not seem to agree with much of the apostle's language in this passage. He rather refers to more general causes of evil, to a readiness to be "*deceived*" on the part of the Church; and he would hardly have spoken of the Roman Emperor as one whose "coming was after the working of Satan, with all power and signs and lying wonders." Rather, he refers very plainly to a growing unfaithfulness of life on the part of many professed believers. He speaks of the "persecutions and tribulations" by which the faith of the saints was being tried, which they endured at the hands of "unreasonable and wicked men, who had not faith," who "received not the love of the truth that they might be saved." And "upon these," he says,—

"God shall send a strong delusion, that they shall believe a lie, that they all might be judged, who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

And they must expect, he says, even greater trials still. The Lord, in His Providence, was still "letting,"—that is, holding back, hindering,—the full outburst of the power of evil, which should come at length, as a mighty flood against the Church. But the time will be when that check shall be removed. And then shall "that Wicked" be revealed, and within the Church, as well as without, shall his influence be felt,—corrupting the fainthearted and faithless, as well as proving and perfecting the faithful and true,—

"that they might be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which they also suffered."

And then should the end be, which is thus described in the Book of Daniel,—in language very similar to that which we find in the Book of Revelations:—

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne the fiery flame, his wheels burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him; the judgment was set, and the books were opened. . . . I saw in the night visions, and behold, one like the Son of Man came with the clouds of heaven, and came to the Ancient of days, and they brought him near before Him. And there was given him

dominion and glory and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve Him; his dominion is an everlasting dominion which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed. . . . And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, *shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High*, whose kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey Him."

It is probable that the writer of this Book of Daniel had no higher idea of the kingdom of God than Nicodemus had in later days, or even the Apostles themselves, when they followed our Lord, as we heard this morning. He probably expected as the apostles did, that, when "that Wicked" One should be removed, the kingdom would "again be restored to Israel," an earthly kingdom, with temporal power and glory—that, as he says, vii.18—

'The saints of the Most High—that is, the faithful Israelites, the true sons of Abraham—should take the kingdom, and possess the kingdom, for ever, even for ever and ever'—

that, as he says elsewhere, v.21,22—"the same horn," the Man of Sin, the son of perdition—who had already been "speaking great words against the Most High," and been "wearing out the saints of the Most High," should "make war against the saints and prevail against them,"—

"Until the Ancient of days should come, and judgment be given to the saints of the Most High, and then the time should come that *the saints should possess the kingdom.*"

St. Paul, no doubt, had far higher and noble, thoughts of the kingdom of God, which, he says, is "righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." Yet he, too, expected—at least, at the time when he wrote this epistle—the speedy personal appearance of the King—that he would come to "consume that Wicked" and "destroy him with the brightness of his coming,"—

"when he should come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe in that day."

And now we know that that fond hope of the early Church was utterly disappointed—that the Son of Man did not come, and that "that wicked" one has not been revealed. But, at every great crisis since in the history of the world, the hope has been revived in the hearts of many, and even still predictions are hazarded by some devout souls as to the exact day and year when the end shall be, and some tremendous conflagration, or some other overwhelming flood of Divine Wrath, is looked for, to sweep away the wicked. But floods and fires, we know, changed the face of the earth ages before the first man lived upon it, ages before

man's sin, as some suppose, had rendered such judgments necessary. Some of you, no doubt, have read the account which one of our greatest living geologists gives of the mighty changes, some slow and gradual—some convulsive, violent, and sudden, which have taken place in the South of France.

We are presented in Auvergne with the evidences of a series of events of astonishing magnitude and grandeur, by which the original form and features of the country have been greatly changed, yet never so far obliterated, but that they may still, in part at least, be restored in imagination. Great lakes have disappeared,—lofty mountains have been formed, by the reiterated emission of lava, preceded and followed by showers of sand and scoriae,—deep valleys have been subsequently furrowed out through masses of lacustrine and volcanic origin,—at a still later date new caves have been thrown up in these valleys, new lakes have been formed by the damming up of rivers,—and more than one creation of quadrupeds, Eocene, Miocene, and Pliocene, have followed in succession. Yet this region has preserved from first to last its geographical identity; and we can still recall to our thought its external condition and physical structure, before these wonderful vicissitudes began, or while a part only of the whole had been completed. . . . There are no signs, during the whole time required for this series of events, of the sea having intervened.

And he elsewhere says, *Ant. of Man*, p.192:—

Had the waters once risen, even for a day, so high as to reach the level of the base of one of these caves, a great part of these volcanoes must inevitably have been swept away.

This, of course, is a convincing proof that the account of the Flood of Noah, as narrated in the Book of Genesis, cannot be regarded as historically true. But it proves also, as I have said, that catastrophes have happened by fire and flood, at a time when the mastodon, rhinoceros, tapir, hippopotamus, “ranged the forest or pastured on the plain,” beneath these fiery mountains,—

and were occasionally overtaken by a fall of burning cinders, or buried in flows of mud, such as accompany volcanic eruptions,—

animals which afterwards “became extinct, and gave place to Pliocene mammalia, and these, in their turn, to species now existing.” And yet man had not sinned, and brought down these judgments on himself and the animal world. No! not in this way does the judgment of God proceed: and it was but a foolish and uncharitable thought that those, upon whom the tower of Siloam fell, were worse sinners than others,—as it would be to say that the two thousand females, who were burnt lately on that dreadful occasion in the South American cathedral, were visited with the Divine displeasure,—or that any other of those appalling events which from time to time occur, and harrow up our



feelings, are open signs of God's judgment, upon men who "do not obey the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness."

Such a notion, in fact, is not only unfounded and uncharitable, but misleading and dangerous, inasmuch as it withdraws our thoughts from the true nature of God's judgments, and helps us to forget that such judgment may need to begin nearer home, nay, may actually be in progress there. Not by the earthquake, and the storm, and the fire, but by the still-small voice is that judgment uttered, and carried out by the constant action of those Eternal Laws, which maintain God's Order in the Universe, in the moral and spiritual, as well as in the Natural World. "The Lord hath made all things for Himself, even the wicked for the day of evil:"—that is to say, no wicked act, no word or deed, no, nor yet a deliberate thought of wrong, can escape that just judgment, which couples in some way shame and sorrow with sin, as the same Law couples life and joy with righteousness.

And this is the true character of prophecy,—not that it predicts future individual events, so as to satisfy man's vain curiosity,—but that it *speaks forth* the thing which is, the Truth, the Word of God. It reads the secrets of the spiritual world, and utters in men's ears the eternal laws of that world, by which all spiritual being is bound to the throne of God. Thus St. Paul was mistaken, no doubt, in expecting speedily the coming of Christ; he was mistaken, too, we may suppose, in expecting the revelation of the Man of Sin. In details such as these he was mistaken, misled, perhaps, by the manner in which he interpreted the words of the Book of Daniel in reference to his own time. But he was not mistaken,—he laid down a fundamental principle of God's government, to which our hearts respond as eternally true,—which, we know, will be fulfilled in some way, *must* be fulfilled, if a God of Law and Order reigns in the Moral Universe,—when he taught, as in the text, that,—

"They all should be judged who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness."

Let us consider these words, and the lesson which they bring to us, a little more closely. By 'the Truth,' no doubt, St. Paul meant generally the Gospel message which he carried from place to place, with all its details, its different doctrines, this very doctrine, for instance, amongst the rest, of the near approach of the Second Coming of Christ, and of

the revelation of the Man of Sin. But did he insist on the reception of every item of his teaching, as essential to a living faith in God? Did he require a strict dogmatic precision, or lay down any definite creed, "which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved"? Did he come to them claiming infallible authority, assuming as an apostle to "lord it over their faith"? Far from it. He said—

"Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man. I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. For we are labourers together with God; ye are God's husbandry, God's building."

He said again—

"Not that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy: for by faith ye stand."

So far indeed was he from insisting on Apostolical infallibility, that we know on one occasion, he openly before them all rebuked St. Peter and the other Judaizers, and Barnabas, who had been "led away with their dissimulation," because he "saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel," and were misleading others by their acts, at all events, which are quite as effective as oral or written teaching. And he himself, as we see, in some part of his teaching was certainly not infallible, as where he speaks so frequently of the immediate coming of Christ, and even announces it "by the word of the Lord"—

"This we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that *we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord*, shall not prevent them which are asleep."

But, in fact, we nowhere find him insisting on correctness of creed—but on correctness of life, of moral conduct. Who are they that shall "not inherit the kingdom of God" according to St. Paul? Those who do not "keep whole and undefiled" some man-formed system of doctrine,—as, for instance, the Athanasian Creed, with all its subtle distinctions, which pass the comprehension of many, if not of all? No! but the unrighteous—the immoral—the unjust—the impure.

"Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God."

From whom does he bid the Corinthians to withdraw themselves, to hold no communion with them? From those who differed with them on articles of faith? No! but from

those, who defiled the religion which they did profess by unbecoming and unholy lives:—

“I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner,—with such an one not to eat.”

There were some among them, he says, who “said that there was no resurrection from the dead,”—in other words, who maintained what would be called in these days a “startling heresy,” destructive of the very “foundations of the faith.” But does he order the Corinthians to have no intercourse with *these* offenders? Does he excommunicate them? Does he say there is no place in the Christian Church for them? Does he put down this heresy by an anathema? Nay, he does nothing of the kind; he calmly reasons about the matter; he sets forth fully and strenuously maintains his own views upon the question, which he had “delivered to them,” as he had “received them” from others. And as before the only censure which he pronounces is against evil living:—

“Be not deceived; evil communications corrupt good manners. Awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God. I speak this to your shame.”

It is the same throughout. In this second epistle to the Thessalonians he says—

“We command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

But lest there should be any doubt as to the meaning of this “tradition,”—lest any should suppose that he refers to “disorderliness” in matters of doctrine,—he goes on at once to say:—

“For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us; for we behaved not ourselves *disorderly* among you; neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you; not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an example unto you to follow us. . . . For we hear that there are some which walk among you *disorderly, working not at all*, but are busy bodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work and eat their own bread. . . . And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.”

It is plain, that the “tradition,” which St. Paul speaks of, is his own example of honest labour, by which he earned his daily bread; the ‘disorderly’ conduct, of which he complained, was the idle, unprofitable life which some led,

gadding about, and meddling with the affairs of others. So great does he deem this evil, so dangerous to themselves, so injurious to the Church, that he would have the more faithful brethren "keep no company" with such as these. Not a word is here said of excommunicating for *false doctrine*. The incestuous man was excommunicated, or, as the phrase then was, "delivered over unto Satan": so were Hymeneus and Alexander, who had "put away a good conscience," had fallen into evil habits of life, and so had "made shipwreck concerning the faith." He says "a man that is an heretic reject—have nothing to do with." But with him a "heretic" was a self-willed man, who "would have his own way in the Church, a factious partizan, who would not listen to truth or reason" (Webster and Wilkinson)—in other words more applicable to our own time, one obstinately persisting in "his own positive assertions and prejudices, against reason, against the light of the age, against the light of God. And, in all this, St. Paul's teaching was but the reflection of that of Christ, who put first and above all things "judgment, merey, and faith," as being the "weightier matters of the law," above all rites and ceremonial observances, above all matters of mere intellectual belief, and who pronounced his blessings upon the "pure in heart," the "meek," the "merciful," the morally correct, not upon the orthodox in Creed and Doctrine.

Accordingly, in the text before us, St. Paul predicts the judgment of God not simply upon those who "believed not the truth," who received not his teaching, but upon those who "believed not the truth, but *had pleasure in unrighteousness*,"—even as he says elsewhere,—

"the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all *ungodliness and unrighteousness* of men, who hold, rather hold down, suppress—the truth in *unrighteousness*."

I repeat, then, difference of opinion in matters of religion, dogmatic difference, even error, as it may seem to us, is not to be treated in the case of any as sin,—was not so treated by the great apostle,—unless accompanied with unfaithfulness of life, with want of honesty, sobriety, charity, truthfulness,—which would show that with them the religious question was not a matter of the heart, a sincere conviction, influencing the whole being, but had been taken up rather as one of debate and controversy,—or unless coupled with that "taking pleasure" in evil, that open abandonment of



what is right and good, that profligate recklessness of conduct, which would indicate that the religious difference had been adopted only as a convenient cloke for sin.

For all this, however, it is our duty to acquire—to strive at least to acquire—*orthodox* views in religion,—that is, as the word properly means, to strive to *think rightly* about God, not according to other men's notions, not according to the decisions of Popes and Councils, but according to the Truth; because our views of our relations to God and Man are affected materially thereby,—because any mistake in reference to God's doings involves also a mistake in our conception of His Character, and therefore also in our sense of duty towards Him and towards each other. Hence we see the grave importance of attending to the light of any kind, which comes to us from any quarter in the Providence of God, comes to us from so many quarters, more especially in this our day. We are as solemnly bound to receive the truths obediently, which Modern Science reveals to us, as to receive the doctrinal teaching of the Bible,—nay, more so, for in these facts of Science, which do not depend upon the mental quality of the discoverer, but, once revealed to us, can be seen by all intelligent minds to be true,—in these facts, I say, the great standing facts of Science, which are now universally recognised by all scientific men,—we have God Himself in His works revealing Himself directly to us. Whereas in the letters of St. Paul and St. Peter we have revelations indeed of Divine Truth, but repeated, as it were, through the minds of these our fellowmen, and in some cases certainly, as in respect of the Second coming of Christ, distorted by passing through this human medium.

Yet many things may prevent man from receiving this light of Science, from 'obeying the truth,' which is thus presented to them. Savage ignorance, like those of the native tribes around us,—defective or degmatic education,—the want of books, the want of teachers, the want of opportunity of study, the want of mental power for studying,—constitutional timidity or feebleness of mind, which makes many shrink from forsaking views in which they have been trained, and embarking, as it seems, upon a wide sea of uncertainty, and that often intensified by violent prejudices, driven in by authority,—the habit of leaving all these things to the clergy, and taking implicitly their word in such matters,—a modest reverence for the authority of the Church,



—all these things may interfere to bar out the light of scientific truth from the minds of very many. And God only can be the Judge, whether disregard of *scientific* truth is more culpable in this case than disregard of *dogmatic* truth in the other,—God only, who knows what light has been given, and for what reason, under what circumstances, it has been rejected. Only of this we may be sure, that, if such rejection of intellectual light be accompanied also with moral delinquency,—if we see men “not obeying truth” of this kind, and withal “taking pleasure in unrighteousness,”—if we see them, refusing to look at facts, denying the most elementary truths of Science, and at the same time unfaithful in daily life, dishonest, untruthful, uncharitable,—in proud self-righteousness setting themselves apart from others, as better, holier, more sure of heaven, than they,—if we see them indulging in angry and bitter speech, in misrepresentation and calumny, against those whose opinions differ from their own,—there is something wrong here; “by their fruits ye shall know them,” says our Lord, and such fruits as these can never be the fruits of the Spirit of Christ, which are “love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.” In this case also, as in the other, there is a judgment, we may be sure, from the Searcher of hearts, upon those who “obey not the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness,”—there is wrath revealed against those who “hold down the truth in unrighteousness.”

We see, then, brethren, our calling and duty, as children of light, as children of God. On doctrinal, as well as scientific, matters we must always be ready to be learners, that we may gain further insight even in this world into the ways and works of God, may know Him more truly, may glorify Him more devoutly. But there *is* Truth, Moral Truth, which is the same for all—which is embraced in the teaching of the Gospel, and affirmed in the experience of all men, and in the silent witnessings of our own hearts. And *that* Truth we must obey, or God’s judgment will assuredly befall us, in this world and in the next. If we live ungodly, selfish lives, that judgment will come upon us here,—not perhaps with outward show and “observation,” any more than the Kingdom of God,—but the curse will be within us, in hollowness and emptiness of heart, and a certain fearful looking for of future misery.

But, if we strive to live as God's children, as followers, servants, brethren, of Christ, a calm settled peace will be ours, amidst all life's troubles, amidst all the war of sects and creeds,—and a hope full of immortality. Yes! let the Fatherhood of God, as Christ has taught us to know it, bind us to seek to grow more like Him, after whose image we were made, to “set God always before us,” to “sanctify the Lord God in our hearts.” Let the Brotherhood of Man, which Christ has also taught us to recognise, remind us daily of our duty to speak and do the truth in love with our brethren, to deal faithfully, righteously, kindly, with all, of whatever colour or creed, who may come within the reach of our influence. And let the example of Christ himself, in life and in death, teach us to count everything subordinate to this, to “obey the truth,” which God makes plain to us, to obey it, at all cost, at any sacrifice. Theologians may dispute for ever about the end and object of our Saviour's coming, about the saving nature of his work, the atoning effect of his death. But these words of the fourth Gospel at any rate are plain, in which he himself sums up the work of his life, describes the whole spirit of it, and gives us a watchword for our own,—

“To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth.”

## A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, July 22, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

---

ROM. viii. 14.—*As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the Sons of God.*

THIS text is often quoted as one of those by means of which a clear and strong line of demarcation may be drawn between the “converted” and “unconverted,” between the “good seed, the children of the kingdom” and the “tares, the children of the Wicked One,”—in forgetfulness of that deep Wisdom that said, “Let both grow together till the harvest,”—at the cost of charity to others, at the expense of hope, the spring of energy, for ourselves. You may have heard these words explained as follows. “As many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, as many as are willing to surrender themselves to His Guidance, and to follow with all their hearts His holy teaching,—*they* are the sons, the true children, of God: they shall enjoy His closer Presence, and shall behold His Face in His Glory.” And, of course, this is true, although it is not what the apostle wishes to tell us in this passage. But the words are often still further pressed to say, “They are *not* sons of God, who do not thus follow the teaching of His Spirit.” What St. Paul really means to say is this. “As many as are under the leading of the Spirit of God,—all those to whom the Eternal Father has vouchsafed such a sure token of His Favour,—they are no other than the Sons of God. He has given them thus the plainest possible proof of their being counted as members of His spiritual Family,—of their being, in very deed and truth, embraced in His Fatherly Care and Love, as Sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.”

The apostle, in fact, is bent on making it clear that no outward matter constituted or could constitute the claim of any to be God's people, God's elect, God's children,—that, no accidents of birth, of age, of race, or of country, can give any right or title to entrance into the kingdom of Heaven,—that it was only a spiritual birth, which did this, and *that*, rightly understood, gave that privilege to all. Just so he says elsewhere, "As in Adam," that is, as partakers of human flesh and blood, "all die," all are mortal, "even so in Christ," that is, as spiritual beings, quickened by the Spirit of Christ, "shall all be made alive," with a life derived through no mortal channel, but from the Father of spirits Himself. But this life is not something bestowed upon some human beings and withheld from others,—except, of course, any who, from defects of organization may not be capable of receiving it, and therefore will not be held responsible for using it, as moral and spiritual creatures. It is not something extraneous to humanity. It is something without which man would not be man, but only a cunning animal; it is something of which every rational human being is conscious in himself, however faintly, and however little others may see the signs of it in his outward course of action.

Some there are who bid us follow nature, and praise her as an unerring guide. And, if by this it is meant that we must observe the Laws of God ordained for man's physical frame,—the laws of health and temperance and chastity, and all that belongs to them,—the advice to a certain extent is good and wise. Nature assuredly will not mislead us: the rule in question is straight and sure: but it is *shorter* than our needs require. There is that in us, with which no physical laws are commensurate: that *in us*, do I say? it is our very selves, to which such advice is given,—that which stands between the two ways, hesitating which to take, whether to yield to the appetites and passions, which make the raw material of animal life, to be shamefully governed by what we were meant to rule, which some call *following Nature*, and blaspheme thereby both God and Man, God's Wisdom which ordained, Man's Nature which was made for, better things, or whether to obey that still prompting, which may be silenced indeed, but not without an effort, which bids us take the upper, the narrow way, the way which through it may be sometimes wearisome to the flesh, steep,

perhaps, and bleak, yet leads upwards into the light, into the blessed kingdom of joy and peace.

Even the heathen poet could speak of the kingly mind that will do what is right, of the fortress of the soul, which consists in the sense of having done no wrong of which the heart is secretly conscious, committed no fault for which the cheek need grow pale. He thus, in fact, appealed to that sense of right and wrong in his fellowmen, which he felt in himself, and which stamped both him and them as spiritual beings, as children of the Living God,—as children who heard the voice of His Spirit, and in some measure followed that voice. And whenever in any one we meet with this acknowledgment, that there is a right to be followed, a wrong to be avoided, even should there be in him from want of culture a very imperfect knowledge of good and evil, there we behold a child of God, one capable of hearing the Divine voice, of following the Divine guidance,—one that is even now in his measure under the leading of the Spirit of God.

But is this all—this germ of light all—that we need care to possess? Do we think so in matters of far less moment? Does the capacity of the savage or of the child for knowledge lead us to say, “This is already an intellectual being: what need is there of teaching, of training, of lessons from higher wisdom, of discipline from the same Divine Hand, that bestowed the first spark of intelligence upon it?” This, we feel at once, is a manifest absurdity. And why, then, should those, who, as I do, claim the blessing of God’s Fatherly Love, the privilege of relationship to God, for everyone however debased, however degraded, of the Great Human Family, be accused of undervaluing the Gospel, of dispensing with the Bible, of setting aside that Divine Education, which is carried on within the Christian Church?—as if all these were not the signs of that same Fatherly Love exerting itself, means used by it to bring us nearer to Himself!

But, we who have been already brought nigh, we Christians, with the Bible in our hands, with the pure morality of the Gospel instilled into us from our infancy, with the sublimest, most affecting, motives to virtue, to holiness, drawn from the Gospel of the Love of God, continually proclaimed in our ears, can *we* pretend to say that we hear no voice calling us, no inward impulse prompting us, to draw still nearer, in faith and obedience, to “put away all



filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit," to "perfect holiness in the fear of God"? Have we no yearnings towards so blessed a state? Do not our hearts smite us, our souls bleed inwardly, whenever we transgress—knowingly transgress—our Father's Will? Or, if by God's Grace we are preserved from outward transgressions, having overcome the main temptations which beset our life, some in its earlier, some in its later stages, are we content without growing still in the knowledge and likeness of Him, who "hath called us to His kingdom and glory"?

Surely, however dissatisfied we may be, and ought to be, with our own attainments in the Divine life, we must know that we have a Heavenly Guide, a Teacher still admonishing us with line upon line, precept upon precept,—that we are being "*led* by the Spirit of God," and not like the lower creatures, or even like the ignorant heathen, driven along by fear of pain, by hope of pleasure or reward, whether in this world or in the next. There are those, indeed, who will dispute this truth, that God's Spirit does speak in the hearts of all men, or will even deny it, will maintain that men generally are not "*led* of the Spirit of God," are not "*sons of God*," but, if anything, are children of the devil, that, if they follow any spiritual influences, they are influences from the Spirit of evil,—that all men, in fact, except a few converted, are children of wrath, without spiritual life, "*without hope and without God in the world*." There are others who will assert that, upon the whole, men are merely the slaves of their appetites or passions, that what is called virtue is but a more refined kind of selfishness, a prudent avoidance of what will disorder and disturb their mental calm or bodily health, the exercise simply of an intelligent selflove. There are those also, who wantonly at times despise their birthright, and trample like swine under their feet the precious pearl of God's Gospel, and turn again and rend those who would offer it to them. But the time comes when perhaps the heart is softened by sorrow, when this world seems to fail beneath the feet of the arguer, when the prodigal remembers with bitter regret the days when he used to say "*Our Father*." Yes! let each one ask himself alone, in the secret of his heart, whether the materialist is right, and we do not fear the answer. Or let us look over what we do really know of the history of mankind past and present; and it must be confessed that from the first men

have been searching and reaching—or as the Bible says, “feeling”—after something, which on the view of the materialist, they should never have felt the want of; the religious instinct of the whole human race, however exerted oftentimes in blind, misdirected efforts, has yet been from the first as the voice of—

An infant crying in the night,  
An infant crying for the light,  
That, crying, feels its Father near.

And, in the case of those who have received the full, clear, teaching of Christ, not dimmed or clouded with the mists of theological controversy or the fogs of dogmatic speculation,—in those who have realised the essential truths which he brought home to us by his Divine Ministry,—the Fatherhood of God, the Brotherhood of Man,—the night has been already changed to morning, and the light of the glory of God has been seen in the Gospel.

Whether, however, with more or less of knowledge, let us all hold fast our belief in God as our Father, and in our relationship to Him as spiritual beings, without which the former would be but a mere barren dogma. The apostle speaks indeed, as we heard last Sunday, of “unreasonable and wicked men,” and he adds “for all men have not faith;” that is, faith has not been in all men developed into conviction; it is a faculty lying dormant in some, in others perhaps smothered, possibly extinguished, by viciousness of life. But all men have the faculty as part of their nature, as an element in it, or they would not be men, it is that which makes them such. It is the very faculty by which we discern *spiritual* things. If it is applied to matters cognisable by the senses, whether our own or those of others whose testimony we receive, it is no longer faith: it is only an assent to something as more or less probably true. It is faith by which we realise that “God IS, and is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.” It is through faith that we believe that by His Mighty Power and Wisdom He made this glorious Universe, that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, that “things which are seen were not made of things that do appear.” It is through faith also that we believe that everything right and good and true will assuredly receive His Blessing, and everything base and wrong will assuredly have its evil consequences, whatever present appearances may say to the contrary in

either ease. It is through faith we know that the pure in heart, the meek, the merciful, *shall* be blessed with the blessings of the Kingdom of Heaven, though all things now may seem to be against them,—that they *shall* “be judged, who do not obey the truth, but have pleasure in unrighteousness,” though the judgment may seem to be delayed, and in their own eyes, and in the eyes of others, they may seem to have escaped it altogether.

But it is quite another faculty, which comes into play, when we profess that we *believe* in this or that particular fact of history,—as that the universe was made in six days, that the earth was overwhelmed with a Flood, that the ass of Balaam spoke, or that Jonah lived in the whale. In all such cases as this, it is not faith which we exercise,—a living faith, by which the reason embraces at once that which is, the eternally right and good and true,—but merely the faculty by which we assent to something conceived by the understanding, after some species of *reasoning*, to be more or less probably—or it may seem to us, even certainly—true. This agrees with the words of Bishop Thirlwall in his last charge, in reference to some, at least, of the facts recorded in the Bible:—

The numbers, migrations, wars, battles, conquests, and reverses of Israel, have nothing in common with the teaching of Christ, with the way of salvation, with the fruits of the Spirit. They belong to a totally different order of subjects. They are not to be confounded with the spiritual revelation contained in the Old Testament, much less with that fulness of grace and truth, which came by Jesus Christ.

In fact, a blind credulity, wrought by hope or fear, and contradicting reason, has no claim whatever to the lofty name of faith, though it is continually adorned with it in the common talk of religionists, and faith and science are often pronounced by them to be alien powers, liable to interfere in each other's domain. But it is not so. On the one hand, by faith we hear God's Voice speaking in our own hearts, or recognise the echoes of that voice in the teaching of our fellowmen. On the other hand, Science obtains her results out of the materials given by our senses, through many conflicting, out of innumerable concurring testimonies. No conclusions of Science can shake the convictions of true faith. No miracle, not the inversion of the whole order of nature, can make right wrong, or wrong right. No piling of mountain upon mountain, in the way of scientific demonstration, can reach the footsteps of the Eternal Throne, on

which faith takes her stand. Thus Faith is too far above Natural Science for the sphere, in which it moves, to intersect the sphere of the other. Those things which are the objects for the discussions of Science,—for reason beholding evidences of Law and Order, of Wisdom and contrivance, in the manifold revelations of the senses,—are not the objects of faith, which deals with things eternal, invisible, not cognizable by the senses, of the relations between spiritual natures, between our spirits and the Father of Spirits Himself, who touches all their hidden springs of life.

“Be ye followers of God as dear children,” says the Apostle in another place,—an injunction which gives us the exact complement of the statement in the text. If God vouchsafes to lead, if He, whom all the worlds obey, finding perfection in so doing, indicates to man the way in which he should walk, yet not as an irresistible monarch, but with the accents of a Father, saying, “My son, my daughter, give me thine heart,”—saying,

“This is the way, walk ye in it, when ye turn to the right hand or turn to the left,”—

shall we not find our happiness in obedience? If we see in Him the Fountain of righteousness, and acknowledge that from Him we derive the power to see what is right, to love what is good, shall we not desire to draw still nearer by obedience to Him from whom the life of our spirits proceeds,—to strive to be, as our Lord enjoins us, perfect as our Father in Heaven is perfect, that is, not to tolerate, not to rest satisfied with, our own imperfections, but to “*follow on to know the Lord.*” To the dutiful child of a worthy parent his words are oracles, his deeds the natural pattern for theirs. How much more when Our Father is the Infinitely Good and Only Wise?

Moreover, we may expect to feel His chastening rod when we forsake His ways. Which of us has not done so? While we abstain from judging others by taking the measure of their good or evil fortunes, from ascribing the great calamities and catastrophes which have come upon the earth to the vengeance of an offended Deity, we each know for ourselves that we have found it ever an evil and a bitter thing to depart from God: we have found that “whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He received.” How blessed is our lot that we can ascribe our sorrows, whether great or small, to the appointment of



One who loves us, who knows what is for our good, and not to an inexorable, unsympathising fate,—that we may take to heart the words of Jesus,—

“Not a sparrow falls to the ground without your Father; fear not ye are of more value than many sparrows; the very hairs of your head are all numbered,”—

that, instead of repining in our afflictions, we can say with the Christian Poet, but lately gathered to his rest,—

Were it not better to lie still,  
Let Him strike home, and bless the rod,  
Never so safe as when our will  
Yields undiscerned by all but God?

How much more when in the path of duty, in seeking to be followers of Him who “for this end was born, and for this cause came into the world, that he might bear witness unto the truth,”—when, I say, in ministering in any way, as best we can, to our fellowmen what we believe in our hearts to be God’s Truth, in respect of any matter, religious, political, or social, we meet with difficulties, opposition, trials, from within and from without,—may we be sure of having One upon our side, who is greater than all, who “will make all things work together for good.” It is God’s Spirit, as we believe, who leads us, and we must follow. The Lord is on our side; we need not fear what man can do unto us. We must commit our cause into Our Father’s hands, remembering that it becomes not us to be impatient, when He has such infinite patience with all, and counting it a small thing what becomes of us, since our Father’s Name will certainly be glorified, and His Will be done,—the light will certainly break through and scatter the darkness, when the right, the appointed, hour shall come.

For let us beware of what has ever been the snare of God’s visible Church, whether Jewish or Christian, namely, that of fancying ourselves or our Church or our party, or those who think with us, the especial favourites of Heaven, and regarding others—our enemies, perhaps, or our opponents—as the enemies and opponents of God Himself. We cannot without arrogance and presumption call ourselves children of God, if we do not believe that every human being, in whom we see the signs, even the faintest signs, of spiritual life, is included within His embrace. Otherwise, we shall not be building on the one broad Foundation which Jesus laid for us in the Fatherly Love of our Creator, but on something in our own insignificant selves, on something peculiar to us.



And thus our hearts will contract, and spiritual pride, the most noxious of all weeds, will grow up high over our heads, and hide from us the blessed light of God's Countenance.

If we were more like God, our Father in Heaven, we should not despise any, we should not despair of any, knowing that—

"not for works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His Mercy He saves us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost,"—

knowing that we need to be "born again," day by day, "of water and of the Spirit," that we may have full entrance into the Kingdom of God,—knowing that we are "led" daily by the same Gracious Spirit, as a sign that we are "sons of God,"—knowing that the same Heavenly Friend is ever pleading with every one of us, and ready to bless with His quickening, purifying influences whoever will arise and go to his Father and say, "Father I have sinned against Heaven and thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son"—that the publican, who dared not so much as lift up his eyes unto heaven, is justified rather than the Pharisee who says, "Stand by! for I am holier than thou."

Yes! that which had once for us, perhaps, the coldness and vagueness of a mere abstract truth,—the truth of God's presence with all men, and therefore with us, in the secrets of our hearts, in the sanctuary of our conscience, leading, guiding, correcting, restraining,—if we live upon it, act upon it, sincerely and honestly, however imperfectly, will be felt by us indeed as no vague generality, but as a part of our own consciousness, a part of the experience of our daily life. We may doubt of many things, and be perplexed with many difficulties. We may find in Scripture, as St. Peter says, "things hard to be understood." We may have no power to read the Bible in Hebrew or Greek, and be unable to satisfy our minds on many questions which vex the intellect, or to quiet them by surrendering our reason to what is called the Voice of the Church. But there need be no doubt here. Every man has the witness in himself that he is "born of God." It needs no argument to prove this: it wants no wisdom of the sage, no learning of the scholar, no experience of age. The merest child can say whether ever, in its secret thoughts, it has heard the whisper of that powerful voice, and felt the leading of God's good Spirit, inclining it to what is good and true, seeking to turn it away from what is

evil. Every good thought which has ever stirred within a man is a witness of this our heavenly parentage. All sense of freedom and gladness when we have done right,—all feeling of shame and bondage when we know we have done wrong,—the very joy that we experience in looking at the wondrous works of God,—

Each vague emotions of delight  
In gazing up an Alpine height,  
Each yearning towards the lamps of night,—

What helps to lift us, though but for a moment, it may be, above the things of time and sense, and makes—

The heart forebode a mystery,  
And name the name Eternity,—

all this is a sign to us that we are not made like unto the brutes that perish, that we have a higher, nobler, birth than they, and a more glorious end, even to know and glorify the Blessed Being who made us, be led by His Spirit here, and live hereafter in the Light of His Presence.

But the apostle justly argues—

“If we call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, let us pass the time of our sojourning here in fear”—

in the reverent fear of children, not of slaves, of children who fear most of all to lose the sight of their Father's Face, not of slaves who would desire, if possible, to see no more of it,—“as obedient children,” he says,—

not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance, but as He which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy, for I am holy.

And, however we may be called to share the discipline of God's children,—whatever may be the trial of our faith and patience, whether in the faithful discharge of duty or the experience of sore bereavement, in the struggle with some besetting sin, or the effort to grow in Christian virtue, in the putting on the armour of light or the casting away the works of darkness, the remainder of corruption which yet clings about us,—in whatever way we may have to endure hardship as soldiers of the cross,—we know that he also, the “captain of our salvation,” was “made perfect through sufferings”—we know that he too—

“in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications, with strong crying and tears, unto Him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared, *though he were a son*, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered, and being thus made perfect, became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him.”



